

I Lent 2024
Sermon-Saint Joseph Parish
Father Craig Looney
St. Matthew 4.1-11



What is the difference between being tested and tempted? We take the words to mean the same thing. The main difference is Satan tempts us and wants to see us fail. God tests our faith and wants to see us succeed.

Our friend, Paul, writes about temptation in his First Letter to the Corinthians. He tells us even those of us who believe in Jesus can expect to be tested just like everyone else. We will never be tested beyond our power to remain firm. God gives us strength to endure the testing...and he provides us a way out.

In his book *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis writes...

...“No man knows how bad he is till he has tried very hard to be good. A silly idea is current that good people do not know what temptation means. This is an obvious lie. Only those who try to resist temptation know how strong it is...A man who gives in to temptation after five minutes simply does not know what it would have been like an hour later. That is why bad people, in one sense, know very little about badness — they have lived a sheltered life by always giving in. We never find out the strength of the evil impulse inside us until we try to fight it: and Christ, because He was the only man who never yielded to temptation, is also the only man who knows to the full what temptation means — the only complete realist.”

This morning's Gospel begs the question why Jesus went into the desert to be tempted by Satan in the first place. Since as C.S. Lewis wrote, he never yielded to temptation...what was the point? Jesus allowed himself to be tempted by Satan to set an example for us.

After fasting and praying in the desert for forty days, Jesus experienced one of the most basic human needs...hunger. Satan told Jesus to order stones to turn into bread. Bread doesn't come from stone...it comes from wheat. Jesus never violated natural law when he performed a miracle. Jesus quotes a passage from Deuteronomy about the manna God supplied for food to the Israelites wandering in the desert...not to depend on bread alone to survive but on every word God speaks.

The Devil also knows the Scriptures. He takes Jesus to the highest point of God's House...The Temple...and asks Jesus to prove he is God's Son by jumping to the ground below. The Devil then quotes Psalm 91 that says God will send his angels to hold Jesus up with their hands and keep even his feet from touching the ground. Jesus responds by again quoting Deuteronomy..."Don't test the Lord your God".

The Devil is persistent in testing Jesus. He takes him to the highest mountain and shows Jesus all the world's kingdoms and their riches. He promises Jesus he will give him everything he sees if he will fall down and worship him. The Devil is a liar and never keeps his promises. Jesus had had enough and again quoting Deuteronomy tells Satan to get lost..."Worship the Lord your God and him alone and serve only him!"

Jesus spent forty days in the desert after he was baptized because he needed time to prepare for his mission. Monasteries and retreat centers are often located in deserts and mountains far away from busy cities. They are places we go to when life gets messy and we need quiet time to reconnect with God.

Lent is our spiritual time in the desert. We use this time to reconnect with God through fasting and prayer and other spiritual disciplines. Our Lenten journey to Good Friday and the cross doesn't make us immune from testing. If anything, Satan puts in overtime trying to distract us. We can't avoid the testing...God allows us to be tested so we can become stronger and not give in to the temptations we might encounter.

We should always remember what Paul tells us in First Corinthians...there is a way out of those temptations. The way out is turning to Jesus...he has been through every test and he is where we get the strength to tell Satan to take a hike and leave us alone.

We turn to Jesus not because we're afraid God is going to send us to hell if we mess up on our Lenten journey. We mess up all the time...he gets that. But we have to be honest with God and ourselves when we do mess up...and God in his love and mercy forgives us. Satan hates nothing more than when we are honest with God and ourselves.

Our Lenten journey to Good Friday and the cross continues. Let's make it a good journey.

